

Larger workloads mean smaller profits for campus watering holes



ADAM
GAUMONT

“Students in 1910 would only need to learned of the developments in a given field up to and including 1910; by 1950, they would have to have learned everything the 1910 students did, plus everything up to 1950; ditto for today’s students. Woe betide the Psych major of the class of 2037.”

The Powerplant may have seemed like an exercise in how not to run a venue with a liquor license, but if it’s any consolation to the unassuming VPOFs who tried to make it work for the past few years, the ‘Plant hasn’t been alone in its struggles.

According to a story published in the *National Post* on 10 November, campus pubs across Canada are all failing miserably. There are many theories as to why this is, including increased health awareness among students who don’t just want to guzzle beer, a wider variety of affordable extra-curricular activities, the prevalence of commuter campuses that empty out at 5pm, and of course, ever-soaring tuition fees and accompanying student debts.

The health theory is proven by the success of places like Dewey’s, which features a full-service coffee bar and light, eclectic short-order fare, even as much of the rest of the brick-and-mortar behemoth sits empty smack-dab in the middle of campus. According to the *Post* article, most other campus coffee shops and juice bars in Canada are doing booming business as well.

But here at the U of A, RATT is still perpetually jammed with students (thanks largely to its campus counterpart being closed), and they serve grub unhealthy enough to make a grizzled greasy-spoon veteran turn green.

More likely, then, is the theory that

students simply have less time to frequent these free-spending establishments. There’s no question that students have more numbers to crunch and more authors to read than ever before, but that’s not the end of the story: students also have more resources and sheer computational power than ever as well. What’s in question here is whether their net load is larger—and after having completed a degree over five years and having watched many others do the same, I would suggest that the answer is an emphatic yes.

This effect is what you could call “academic efficiency.” Similar to economic efficiency, it continually forces the producers in the academic marketplace (students) to become more efficient. Competition (other students) and demands from consumers (professors) both serve to drive production costs (the time and resources spent completing assignments) down and output (the frequency and speed of the assignments themselves) up.

As professors’ demands continually get met, they will continually up the ante every year. Students have no choice but to comply due to competitive pressures and established regulations (ie, the academic grading system). In such a system, students have no way of getting ahead, as they’re always pressured to perform at maximum efficiency—that is, once they reach a certain level

of efficiency, that becomes the new, unexceptional standard.

Now, a little bit of healthy competition and increased efficiency aren’t necessarily a bad thing. But coupled with this theoretically self-balancing system is a linear increase in the amount of knowledge that students are required to learn, which means an inevitable net gain in academic pressures, even when you take increased efficiency into account. Students in 1910 would only need to learn of the developments in a given field up to and including 1910; by 1950, they would have to have learned everything the 1910 students did, plus everything up to 1950; ditto for today’s students. Woe betide the psych major of the class of 2037.

Unfortunately, there’s no real way out of this mess, not unless professors adopt a universal homework labour standard for how much students have to learn or how many hours they ought to put in in a week. But as any proponent of free-market academia worth his or her salt will tell you, regulatory intervention should be used sparingly in order to maximize intellectual profit and growth. So until that time, it looks like students will either have to skip out on that RATT burger and beer or pull yet another caffeine-fuelled all-nighter.

Now if you’ll excuse me, I think my order of sweet-potato fries and fair trade mochachino is up.

Good things come in small packages

Or how I learned to stop worrying about cramped apartments and love HUB



BRIAN
GOULD

to a 30 year mortgage or drive 30 minutes instead of walking.

I love joking about the size of the bedrooms, which are perfect eight-by-eight cubes. Though I recommend you don’t think about this, nor how those cubes are stacked three high and 120 long. I’m not claustrophobic, but I had a minor freakout this summer when I tinfoiled my bedroom windows.

**It will have been
42 months when
they finally pry my
fingernails from the
wall, but I just can’t get
enough of this place.**

Whether or not you like the size, HUB has some definite advantages. It has shockingly passable transit for Edmonton, and it’s probably the only place in the city where it’s easier to get around by biking than driving.

I’m not a fan of pedways because they destroy street life, but there’s something irresistible about going downtown via the LRT and not needing a coat. I’ve used this trick numerous times for job interviews, concerts, movies, volunteering, and more. Just don’t make the mistake of doing so in winter.

Superb architecture makes HUB great, especially the faux streetfront retail. Since the real thing has been

largely extinct in Edmonton outside Whyte Avenue for the better part of a century, it’s a refreshing change of pace to be able to walk a block and have your selection of dozens of restaurants and a wide variety of stores.

One thing that’s missing is a grocery store, which has always struck me as a great way to make a killing on overpriced milk. Unfortunately, due to the space crunch on campus, there’s been a shocking number of conversions to office and study space—something that needs to stop before it destroys HUB’s unique feel.

With the lack of affordable housing for students, it boggles my mind that the University operates a 700-stall surface parking lot next door, when the same space could easily house 1000. As much as residents love to complain about HUB, they don’t stop registering. And if you want a two-bedroom for next year, you might already be too late to get your pick of roommates.

There’s more than enough room to double HUB by building out into the parking lot at the same height. With the U-Pass in place, we should be able to spare the parking, but if not, we can just put it underground. We could help defray some of the costs by dedicating a wing to market-priced apartments for non-students. Taking the mayhem out of campus could make HUB attractive to young families; there’s a daycare in the building and two schools a short walk away. You can bet I’d be the first in line to move back in.

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